

For Immediate Release

**Testimony Prepared for Delivery by
U.S. Senator Patty Murray (D-Wash) on
Pipeline Safety**

*Before the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
May 11, 2000*

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for holding this hearing, and thank you for your leadership on this issue. I'd also like to thank the members of this committee. I've met with many of you over the past few months as I've tried to raise awareness about pipeline safety, and I appreciate the time you have taken to consider pipeline safety reform.

Mr. Chairman, I'm pleased this committee is now focusing on pipeline safety. I've been pushing for this day for a long time, and I'm grateful it is here.

At the same time, I wish we didn't have to be here today. I wish we didn't have to worry about pipeline safety. I wish June 10, 1999 was just another quiet summer day in the city of Bellingham, Washington -- instead of a black mark in our memory.

On that day, a gasoline pipeline in Bellingham ruptured -- spilling more than 275,000 gallons of fuel. That pipeline disaster resulted in the deaths of three young people, and left thousands of people in my state wondering about the safety of the pipelines near their homes.

Mr. Chairman, we can't undo what happened in Bellingham. It will never be the same. But we can take steps to reduce the chances that another community will suffer from a pipeline disaster. Mr. Chairman, we can pass a strong pipeline safety bill this year. Today is an important step in the legislative process, and we have to see this through to the end.

If this committee does not pass a pipeline safety bill -- this year -- it will have missed an opportunity to protect the people we represent.

There are 2.2 million miles of pipelines running across the country. They run near our schools, homes and communities. They perform a vital service -- bringing us the energy we need to fuel our cars and heat our homes.

At the same time, they are not as safe as they could be. We have a responsibility to pass a bill this year that will protect families from the dangers of unsafe pipelines.

That's why back in January I introduced my own pipeline safety bill -- the Pipeline Safety Act of 2000. And I want to thank the members who have signed on as co-sponsors -- Senators Inouye, Gorton, Wyden, Lautenberg, and Bayh.

I went door-to-door and met with a number of other Senators and House members. I showed them the graphic pictures of what happened in my state, and I showed them the statistics of how pipelines were affecting the people in their own states.

And I worked with Administration officials -- including Transportation Secretary Rodney Slater -- who was very responsive to the tragedy in my state and who has been a partner in improving pipeline safety. I've also worked with and heard from safety officials, citizen groups, and industry representatives.

In March, Senator Gorton and I also participated in a field hearing in Bellingham -- hosted by this committee. Last month, I spoke at a national conference on pipeline safety here in Washington, D.C. It was hosted by the National Pipeline Reform Coalition, SAFE Bellingham, and the Cascade Columbia Alliance. That conference proved that people all across the country are following this issue closely. They understand the problem, and they are calling for action.

Mr. Chairman, I want to be clear. We cannot wait any longer, and we certainly cannot let this year pass without improving our nation's inadequate pipeline safety laws.

While it may be true that transporting hazardous liquids through pipelines is safer than transporting them on barges and trucks, there are several areas where existing laws aren't doing enough to protect the public.

The danger posed by aging, corroded pipelines is not going away. In fact, it's getting worse. Since 1986, there have been more than 5,700 pipeline accidents, 325 deaths, 1500 injuries, and almost \$1 billion in environmental damage. On average there is 1 pipeline accident every day, and 6 million hazardous gallons are spilled into our environment every year.

In the four months since I introduced my pipeline safety bill, at least 20 states have experienced pipeline accidents. I don't want another community to go through what the people of Bellingham, Washington have gone through. We can make pipelines safer today.

Along with the bill I introduced in January, I am pleased that Senator Hollings has submitted the administration's proposal. Senator McCain has also offered a measure to improve our nation's pipelines, and I'm proud to be a co-sponsor of his bill.

While none of these bills are perfect, I hope when your committee marks up pipeline legislation later this month you will improve on the bills before you. Certainly when this bill hits the floor, I will do everything I can to work with the members of this committee to ensure we pass an effective bill.

I'm pleased that all of the current proposals touch on five key areas of pipeline safety:

First, these bills recognize the need to improve pipeline inspection and accident prevention practices;

Second, they recognize the need to develop and invest in new safety and inspection technology;

Third, they expand the Public's Right To Know about problems with pipelines;

Fourth, they recognize that states can be better partners in improving pipeline safety; and

Finally, these bills increase funding for new state and federal pipeline safety programs.

I'm proud to say that we are making progress. Having the administration, Senator McCain, and Senator Hollings fully-engaged in this issue increases the chance that we will do the right thing and pass pipeline legislation this year.

During the committee process, I hope we can all work together in a bipartisan manner to improve pipeline safety. I know it's an election year, and we often find ourselves being partisan in times like this.

Pipeline safety isn't a partisan issue. It's something we can do this year in a bipartisan way on behalf of all of our constituents.

In my state, the whole political spectrum has come together to support pipeline safety. I hope this committee and this Congress will follow that example, and I look forward to working with the members of this committee in that effort.

Pipeline safety reform can become an accomplishment of the 106th Congress. Put simply, Mr. Chairman, we can do this. Mr. Chairman, before I close I would like to thank you for lending your support and helping us move closer to making pipelines safer.

I would also like to thank those who will be testifying today -- administration witnesses, industry representatives, and those here from the environmental and consumer advocate communities.

But I'd especially like to thank the families of the victims. They have gone through so much, and they are working to make sure no other family has to endure what they have been through.

I know it wasn't easy for them to come to here today, but their strength and their courage remind us of what we must do. Mr. Chairman, now it is up to this Senate to match their courage by passing a meaningful pipeline safety bill this year.

Thank you.